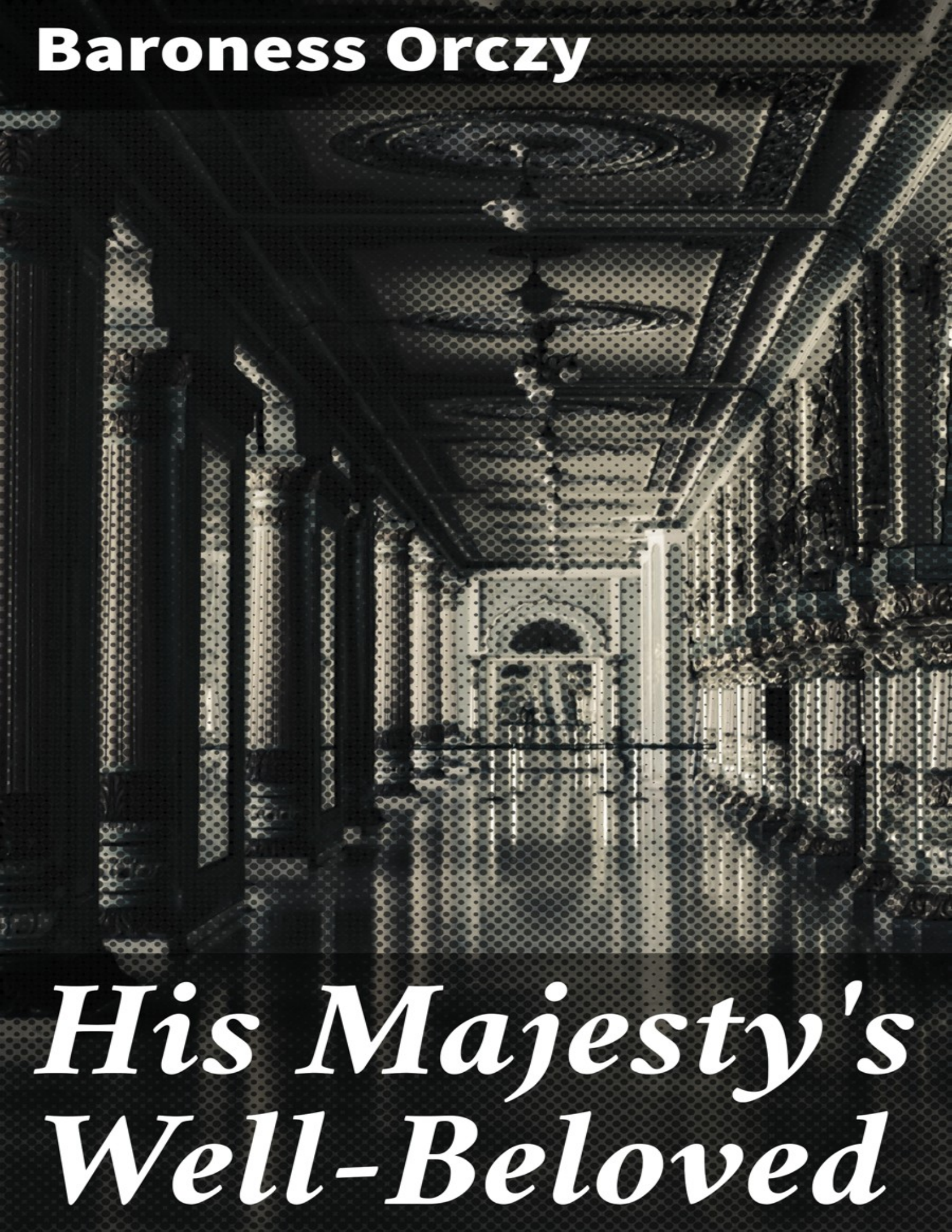
Baroness Orczy



His Majesty's Well-Beloved

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Chapter 1
How it all Began

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From Mr. John Honeywood, clerk to Mr. Theophilus Baggs, attorney-at-law, to Mistress Mary Saunderson, of the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

May it please you that I, an humble Clerk and Scrivener, do venture to address so talented a Lady; but there is that upon my Conscience which compels me to write these lines. The Goodness and Charity of Mistress Saunderson are well known, and 'tis not as a Suppliant that I crave pardon for my Presumption, but rather as one whose fidelity and loyalty have oft been tried and never been found wanting. 'Tis said, most gracious Mistress, that your fancy hath been touched by the tenderness and devotion of a Man who is as dear to me as if he were mine own Brother, but that You hesitate to bestow upon him that for which he craves more than for anything in the world, your Hand and Heart. And this because of many Rumours which have sullied his fair Name. Mr. Betterton, Madam, hath many enemies. How could this be otherwise seeing that so vast a measure of Success hath attended his career, and that the King's most gracious Majesty doth honour him with Friendship and Regard to the exclusion of others who are envious of so great a fame? Those Enemies now, Madam, seeing that your Heart hath been touched with the man's grace and bearing, rather than

with his undying Renown, have set themselves the task of blackening Mr. Betterton's character before your eyes, thus causing you mayhap grievous Sorrow and Disappointment. But this I do swear by all that I hold most sacred, that Mr. Betterton hath never committed a mean Act in his life nor done aught to forfeit your Regard. Caustic of wit he is, but neither a Braggart nor a Bully; he hath been credited with many good Fortunes, but so hath every Gentleman in the Kingdom, and there is no discredit attached to a man for subjugating the Hearts of those that are both frail and fair. My Lady Castlemaine hath bestowed many favours on Mr. Betterton, so hath the Countess of Shrewsbury, and there are others, at least the Gossips do aver it. But on my Soul and Honour, he hath never ceased to love You, until the day when a certain great Lady came across his path for his misfortune and his undying Regret. And even so, Madam, though appearances are against him, I own, let me assure You that the swerving of his Allegiance to You was not only transitory but it was never one of the Heart—it was a mere aberration of the senses. He may never forget the Lady—he certainly will never forget her Cruelty—but he no longer loves Her, never did love Her as he loves You, with his Heart and Mind, with Tenderness and Devotion. The other was only a Dream—a fitful fancy: his Love for You is as immortal as his Fame. Therefore, gracious Mistress, I, the humble Friend of so great a Man, have ventured to set forth for your perusal that which he himself would be too proud to put before you—namely, his Justification. As for the rest, what I am about to relate is the true Historie of Mr. Betterton's Romance, the only one which might give you cause for

sorrow, yet none for uneasiness, because that Romance is now a thing of the past, like unto a Flower that is faded and without fragrance, even though it still lies pressed between the pages of a great man's Book of Life. Everything else is mere Episode. But this which I have here set down will show you how much nobility of heart and grandeur of Character lies hidden beneath the flippant and at times grim exterior of the Man whom you have honoured with your regard.

The writing of the Historie hath caused me much anxiety and deep thought. I desired to present the Truth before you, and not the highly-coloured effusions of a Partisan. I have slurred over nothing, concealed nothing. An you, gracious Mistress, have the patience to read unto the End, I am confident that any Hesitation as to your Future which may still linger in your Heart will vanish with the more intimate Knowledge of the true Facts of the case, as well as of the Man whose faults are of his own Time and of his Entourage, but whose Merits are for the whole World to know and to cherish, for as many Cycles of years as there will be Englishmen to speak the Words of English Poets.

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Dare I take you back, honoured Mistress, to those humble days, five years ago, when first I entered the Household of your worthy Uncle, Mr. Theophilus Baggs, and of his still more worthy Spouse, Mistress Euphrosine, where for a small —very small—stipend, and free board and lodging, I copied legal documents, Leases, Wills and Indentures for my Employer?

You, fair Lady, were then the only ray of Sunshine which illumined the darkness of my dreary Life. Yours was a Gaiety which nothing could damp, a Courage and Vitality which not even the nagging disposition of Mistress Euphrosine succeeded in crushing. And when, smarting under her many Chidings, my stomach craving for a small Measure of satisfaction, my Bones aching from the hardness of my bed, I saw your slim Figure flitting, elf-like, from kitchen to living-room, your full young Throat bursting with song like that of a Bird at the first scent of Spring, I would find my lot less hard, the bread less sour, even Mistress Euphrosine's tongue less acrimonious. My poor, atrophied Heart felt the warmth of your Smile.

Then sometimes, when my Work was done and my Employers occupied with their own affairs, You used to allow me to be of service to you, to help you wash the dishes which your dainty Hands should never have been allowed to touch.

Oh! how I writhed when I heard Mistress Euphrosine ordering You about as if You were a kitchen-wench, rather than her husband's Niece, who was honouring his House with your presence! You, so exquisite, so perfect, so cultured, to be the Handmaid of a pair of sour, ill-conditioned Reprobates who were not worthy to tie the lacets of your dainty shoes. With what Joy I performed the menial tasks which never should have been allotted to You, I never until now have dared to tell. I did not think that any Man could find dish-washing and floor-scrubbing quite so enchanting. But then no other Man hath ever to my knowledge performed such tasks under such happy

circumstances; with You standing before me, smiling and laughing at my clumsiness, your shapely arms akimbo, your Voice now rippling into Song, now chaffing me with Words full of kindness and good-humour.

I have known many happy Hours since that Day, Mistress, and many Hours full of Sorrow, but none so full of pulsating Life as those which outwardly had seemed so miserable.

And then that wonderful afternoon when Mr. Theophilus Baggs and his Spouse being safely out of the way, we stole out together and spent a few hours at the Play! Do you remember the day on which we ventured on the Escapade? Mr. Baggs and Mistress Euphrosine had gone to Hampton Court: he to see a noble Client and she to accompany him. The day being fine and the Client being a Lady possessed of well-known charms, Mistress Euphrosine would not have trusted her Lord alone in the company of such a forward Minx—at least, those were her Words, which she uttered in my hearing two Days before the memorable Expedition.

Memorable, indeed, it was to me!

Mr. Baggs left a sheaf of Documents for me to copy, which would—he thought—keep me occupied during the whole course of a long Day. You too, fair Mistress, were to be kept busy during the worthy couple’s absence, by scrubbing and polishing and sewing—Mistress Euphrosine holding all idleness in abhorrence.

I marvel if you remember it all!

I do, as if it had occurred yesterday! We sat up half the Night previous to our Taskmasters’ departure; you polishing and sewing, and I copying away for very life. You remember?

Our joint Savings for the past six Months we had counted up together. They amounted to three shillings. One shilling we spent in oil for our lamps, so that we might complete our Tasks during the Night. This left us free for the great and glorious Purpose which we had in our Minds and which we had planned and brooded over for Days and Weeks.

We meant to go to the Play!

It seems strange now, in view of your Renown, fair Mistress, and of mine own intimacy with Mr. Betterton, that You and I had both reached an age of Man and Womanhood without ever having been to the Play. Yet You belonged from childhood to the household of Mistress Euphrosine Baggs, who is own sister to Mr. Betterton. But that worthy Woman abhorred the Stage and all that pertained to it, and she blushed—aye, blushed!—at thought of the marvellous Fame attained by her illustrious Brother.

Do you remember confiding to me, less than a month after I first entered the household of Mr. Baggs, that You were pining to go to the Play? You had seen Mr. Betterton once or twice when he came to visit his Sister—which he did not do very often—but you had never actually been made acquainted with him, nor had you ever seen him act. And You told me how handsome he was, and how distinguished; and your dark Eyes would flash with enthusiasm at thought of the Actor’s Art and of the Actor’s Power.

I had never seen him at all in those Days, but I loved to hear about him. Strange what a fascination the Stage exercised over so insignificant and so mean a creature as I!

Will you ever forget the dawn of that glorious Day, fair Mistress?

Mr. Baggs and his Spouse went off quite early, to catch the chaise at La Belle Sauvage which would take them to Hampton Court. But however early they went, we thought them mighty slow in making a start. An hundred Recommendations, Orderings, Scoldings, had to be gone through ere the respectable Couple, carrying provisions for the day in a Bandana Handkerchief, finally got on the way.

It was a perfect Morning early in March, with the first scent and feel of Spring in the air. Not a Cloud in the Sky. By Midday our tasks were entirely accomplished and we were free! Free as the Birds in the air, free as two ’prentices out for a holiday! But little did we eat, I remember. We were too excited for hunger; nor had Mistress Euphrosine left much in the larder for us. What did we care? Our Enthusiasm, our Eagerness, were Cook and Scullion for us, that day!

We were going to the Play!

Oh! how we tripped to Cockpit Lane, asking our way from passers-by, for we knew so little of London—fashionable London, that is; the London of Gaiety and Laughter, of careless Thoughts and wayward Moods. Holding hands, we hurried through the Streets. You wore a dark Cape with a Hood to hide your pretty Face and your soft brown Hair, lest some Acquaintance of your Uncle’s should chance to see You and betray our guilty secret.

Do you remember how we met Mr. Rhodes, the bookseller, and friend of Mr. Baggs?—he to whom young Mr. Betterton was even then apprenticed. At the corner of

Princes Street we came nose to nose with him, and but for great presence of mind on my part when, without an instant's hesitation, I ran straight at him and butted him in the Stomach so that he lost his Balance for the moment and only recovered complete Consciousness after we had disappeared round the corner of the Street, he no doubt would have recognised us and betrayed our naughty Secret.

Oh, what a fright we had! I can see You now, leaning, breathless and panting, against the street corner, your Hand pressed to your Bosom, your Eyes shining like Stars!

As for the rest, it is all confusion in my mind. The Crowd, the Bustle, the Noise, this great Assembly, the like of which I had never seen before. I do not know how we came to our seats. All I know is that we were there, looking down upon the moving throng. I remember that some Worthy of obvious note was sitting next to me, and was perpetually treading upon my toes. But this I did not mind, for he was good enough to point out to me the various Notabilities amongst the Audience or upon the Stage; and I was greatly marvelled and awed by the wonderful familiarity with which he spoke of all these distinguished People.

"There sits General Monk. Brave old George! By gad! 'twere interesting to know what goes on inside that square Head of his! King or Protector, which is it to be? Or Protector *and* King! George knows; and you mark my words, young Sir, George will be the one to decide. Old Noll is sick; he can't last long. And Master Richard hath not much affection for his Father's Friends—calls them Reprobates and ungodly. Well! can you see George being rebuked by Master Richard for going to the Play?"

And I, not being on such intimate terms with the Lord Protector's Son or with General Monk, could offer no opinion on the subject. And after a while my Neighbour went on glibly:

"Ah! here comes my Lady Viner, flaunting silks and satins. Aye, the fair Alice—his third Wife, mark you!—knows how to spend the money which her Lord hath been at such pains to scrape together. By gad! who'd have thought to see red-haired Polly Ann so soon after the demise of His Grace! See, not an inch of widows' Weeds doth she wear in honour of the old Dotard who did her the infinite favour of dying just in the nick of time...."

And so on, the Man would babble in a continuous stream of talk. You, Mistress, listened to him open-mouthed, your great brown Eyes aglow with curiosity and with excitement. You and I knew but little of those great Folk, and seeing them all around us, prepared for the same enjoyment which we had paid to obtain, made us quite intoxicated with eagerness.

Our Neighbour, who of a truth seemed to know everything, expressed great surprise at the fact that Old Noll—as he so unceremoniously named the Lord Protector—had tolerated the opening of the Cockpit. "But," he added sententiously, "Bill Davenant could wheedle a block of ice out of the devil, if he chose."

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Of the Play I remember but little. I was in truth much too excited to take it all in. And sitting so near You, Mistress—for

the Place was overcrowded—my Knee touching yours, your dear little hand darting out from time to time to grip mine convulsively during the more palpitating moments of the Entertainment, was quite as much as an humble Clerk's brain could hold.

There was a great deal of Music—that I do remember. Also that the entertainment was termed an opera and that the name of the piece was "The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru." My omniscient Neighbour told me presently that no doubt the Performance was an artful piece of Flattery on the part of Bill (meaning, I suppose, Sir William Davenant) who, by blackening the Spaniards, made Old Noll's tyranny appear like bountiful Mercies.

But I did not like to hear our Lord Protector spoken of with such levity. Moreover, my Neighbour's incessant Chatter distracted me from the Stage.

What I do remember more vividly than anything else on that memorable Day was your cry of delight when Mr. Betterton appeared upon the Stage. I do not know if you had actually spoken with him before; I certainly had never even seen him. Mr. Betterton was then apprenticed to Mr. Rhodes, the Bookseller, and it was entirely against the Judgment and Wishes of Mistress Euphrosine Baggs, his Sister, that he adopted the Stage as an additional calling. I know that there were many high Words on that subject between Mr. Betterton and Mistress Euphrosine, Mr. Rhodes greatly supporting the young Man in his Desire, he having already formulated schemes of his own for the management of a Theatre, and extolling the virtues of the Actor's Art and the vastly lucrative State thereof.

But Mistress Euphrosine would have none of it. Actors were Rogues and Vagabonds, she said, ungodly Reprobates who were unfit, when dead, to be buried in consecrated ground. She would never consent to seeing a Brother of hers follow so disreputable a Calling. From high words it came to an open Quarrel, and though I had been over a year in the House of Mr. Theophilus Baggs, I had never until this day set eyes on young Mr. Betterton.

He was not taking a very important part in the Opera, but there was no denying the fact that as soon as he appeared upon the Stage his very Presence did throw every other Actor into the shade. The Ladies in the Boxes gave a deep sigh of content, gazing on him with admiring eyes and bestowing loud Applause upon his every Word. And when Mr. Betterton threw out his Arms with a gesture expressive of a noble Passion and spoke the ringing lines: “And tell me then, ye Sons of England...”—his beautiful Voice rising and falling with the perfect cadence of an exquisite Harmony—the uproar of Enthusiasm became wellnigh deafening. The Ladies clapped their Hands and waved their Handkerchiefs, the Gentlemen stamped their feet upon the floor; and some, lifting their Hats, threw them with a flourish upon the Stage, so that anon Mr. Betterton stood with a score or more Hats all round his feet, and was greatly perturbed as to how he should sort them out and restore them to their rightful Owners.

Ah, it was a glorious Day! Nothing could mar the perfection of its Course. No! not even the Rain which presently began to patter over the Spectators, and anon fell in torrents, so that those who were in the Pit had to beat a

precipitate retreat, scrambling helter-skelter over the Benches in a wild endeavour to get under cover.

This incident somewhat marred the Harmony of the Ending, because to see Ladies and Gentlemen struggling and scrambling to climb from bench to bench under a Deluge of Rain, was in truth a very droll Spectacle; and the attention of those in the Boxes was divided between the Happenings on the Stage and the antics of the rest of the Audience.

You and I, fair Mistress, up aloft in our humble place, were far better sheltered than the more grand Folk in the Pit. I put your Cloak around your Shoulders to protect You against the Cold, and thus sitting close together, my knee still resting against yours, we watched the Performance until the end.

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How we went home that afternoon I do not remember. I know that it was raining heavily and that we got very wet. But this caused me no Inconvenience, because it gave me the privilege of placing my Arm round your Shoulders so as to keep your Cloak from falling. Also my Mind was too full of what I had seen to heed the paltry discomfort of a Wetting. My thoughts were of the Play, the Music, the brilliant Assembly; yours, Mistress, were of Mr. Betterton. Of him you prattled all the way home, to the exclusion of every other Topic. And if your enthusiastic Eulogy of that talented Person did at times send a pang of Sorrow through my Heart, You at least were unaware of my Trouble. Not that I took no share

in your Enthusiasm. I did it whole-heartedly. Never had I admired a Man before as I did Mr. Betterton on that Day. His Presence was commanding, his Face striking, his Voice at times masterful and full of Power, at others infinitely sweet. My officious and talkative Neighbour, just before the Rain came down and rendered him dumb, had remarked to me with a great air of Knowledge and of Finality: “Mark my word, young Sir, England will hear something presently of Tommy Betterton.”

It was not until we reached the corner of Chancery Lane that we were forced to descend to the Realities of Life. We had had a glorious Day, and for many Hours had wholly forgotten the many Annoyances and Discomforts with which our lives were beset. Now we were a little tired and exceedingly wet. Mistress Euphrosine’s Scoldings, our oft empty stomachs, hard Beds and cheerless Lives loomed once more largely upon the Horizon of our mental vision.

Our Pace began to slacken; your glib Tongue was stilled. Holding Hands now, we hurried home in silence, our Minds stirred by a still vague Sense of Fear.

Nor was that Fear unjustified, alas! as subsequent Events proved. No sooner had We entered the House than We knew that We were discovered. Mr. Baggs’ cloak, hung up in the Hall, revealed the terrifying Fact that he and his indomitable Spouse had unaccountably returned at this hour. No doubt that the Weather was the primary cause of this untoward Event: its immediate result was a Volley of abuse poured upon our Heads by Mistress Euphrosine’s eloquent Tongue. We were Reprobates, Spawns and Children of the Devil! We were Liars and Cheats and Thieves! We had deserved God’s

wrath and eternal punishment! Heavens above! how she did talk! And we, alas! could not escape that vituperative Torrent.

We had fled into the Kitchen as soon as We had realised that we were fairly caught; but Mistress Euphrosine had followed us thither and had closed the door behind her. And now, standing facing Us, her large, gaunt Body barring every egress, she talked and talked until You, fair Mistress, gave way to a passionate Flood of tears.

All our Pleasure, our Joy, had vanished; driven hence by the vixenish Tongue of a soured Harridan. I was beside myself with Rage. But for your restraining influence, I could have struck that shrieking Virago, and for ever after have destroyed what was the very Essence of my Life. For she would have turned me out of Doors then and there, and I should have been driven forth from your Presence, perhaps never to return.

The sight of your Patience and of your Goodness helped to deaden my Wrath. I hung my Head and bit my Tongue lest it should betray me into saying things which I should have regretted to the end of my Days.

And thus that memorable Day came to a close. Somehow, it stands before my mind as would the first legible Page in the Book of my Life. Before it, everything was blurred; but that Page is clear. I can read it now, even after four years. For the first time, destiny had writ on it two Names in bold, indelible Characters—yours, Mistress, and that of Mr. Betterton. Henceforth, not a Day in my Life would pass without one of You looming largely in its Scheme.

Mary Saunderson! Tom Betterton! My very pulses seem to beat to the tune of those two Names! I knew then, by one of those subtle intuitions which no Man has ever succeeded in comprehending, that Heaven itself had intended You for one another. How then could I stand by and see the Wickedness of Man striving to interfere with the decrees of God?

Chapter 2
The Rift Within The Lute

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After that memorable Day, Mistress, we were like naughty Children who were being punished for playing truant out of School. For Weeks and Months our Lives went on with dreary monotony, with never a chance of seeing Something of that outside World of which we had caught a glimpse. You continued to sew and to scrub and to be at the beck and call of a Scold. I went on copying legal Documents till my very Brain appeared atrophied, incapable of a single happy Thought or of a joyous Hope.

Out there in the great World, many things were happening. The Lord Protector died; his Son succeeded. And then England woke to the fact that she had never cared for these Regicides, Republicans and Puritans; that in her Heart she had always loved the martyred King and longed to set his Son once more upon his Throne.

I often thought of my loquacious Neighbour at the Play, with his talk of Old Noll and Master Richard and of George. For George Monk in truth had become the Man of the hour; for he it was who was bringing King Charles back into his Kingdom again.

Two years had gone by since our memorable Day at the Play, and as that same Neighbour had also foretold, England was hearing a great deal about Tom Betterton. His Name

was on every one's lips. Mr. Rhodes, the Bookseller, had obtained a licence from General Monk to get a Company of Actors together, and the palmy Days of the Cockpit had begun. Then it was that some faint Echo of the Life of our great City penetrated as far as the dull Purlieus of Mr. Baggs' Household; then it was that the ring of the Fame of Mr. Betterton even caused Mistress Euphrosine to recall her former arbitrary Judgments.

Every one now was talking of her illustrious Brother. General Monk himself had made a Friend of him, so had Sir John Grenville, who was the King's own Envoy; and those who were in the know prophesied that His Majesty Himself would presently honour the eminent Player with his regard. My Lord Rochester was his intimate Friend; Sir George Etherege was scarce ever seen in public without him. Lord Broghill had vowed that the English Stage was made famous throughout the Continent of Europe by the superlative excellence of Mr. Betterton.

To such Eulogies, coming from the most exalted Personages in the Land, Mistress Euphrosine could not turn an altogether deaf Ear; and being a Woman of character and ambition, she soon realised that her Antagonism to her illustrious Brother not only rendered her ridiculous, but might even prove a bar to Mr. Theophilus Baggs' Advancement.

The first Step towards a Reconciliation was taken when Mr. Baggs and his Spouse went together to the Play to see Mr. Betterton act *Solyman* in a play called "The Siege of Rhodes." You and I, Mistress, were by great favour allowed to go too, and to take our places in that same Gallery where

two Years previously You and I had spent such happy hours. We spoke little to one another, I remember. Our hearts were full of Memories; but I could see your brown Eyes lighten as soon as the eminent Actor walked upon the Stage. The same Glamour which his personality had thrown over You two years ago was still there. Nay! it was enhanced an hundredfold, for to the magnetic presence of the Man was now added the supreme Magic of the Artist. I am too humble a Scrivener, fair Lady, to attempt to describe Mr. Betterton's acting, nor do I think that such Art as his could be adequately discussed. Your enjoyment of it I did fully share. You devoured him with your Eyes while he was on the Stage, and the Charm of his Voice filled the crowded Theatre and silenced every other sound. I knew that the World had ceased to exist for You and that the mysterious and elusive god of Love had hit your Heart with his wayward dart.

I thank God that neither then nor later did any feeling of Bitterness enter into my Soul. Sad I was, but of a gentle Sadness which made me feel mine own Unworthiness, even whilst I prayed that You might realise your Heart's desire.

Strangely enough, it was at the very moment when I first understood the state of your Feelings that mine eyes, a little dimmed with tears, were arrested by the Sight of a young and beautiful Lady, who sat in one of the Boxes, not very far from our point of vantage. I wondered then what it was about her that thus enchained mine Attention. Of a truth, she was singularly fair, of that dainty and translucent Fairness which I for one have never been able to admire, but which is wont to set Men's pulses beating with an added quickness—at least, so I've heard it said. The Lady had blue

Eyes, an exquisitely white Skin, her golden Hair was dressed in the new modish Fashion, with quaint little Ringlets all around her low, square Brow. The face was that of a Child, yet there was something about the firm Chin, something about the Forehead and the set of the Lips which spoke of Character and of Strength not often found in one so young.

Immediately behind her sat a young Cavalier of prepossessing Appearance, who obviously was whispering pleasing Words in the Lady's shell-like ear. I confess that for the moment I longed for the presence of our loquacious Neighbour of two years ago. He, without doubt, would have known who the noble young Lady was and who was her attentive Cavalier. Soon, however, the progress of the Play once more riveted mine Attention upon the Stage, and I forgot all about the beautiful Lady until it was time to go. Then I sought her with mine Eyes; but she had already gone. And I, whilst privileged to arrange your Cloak around your shoulders, realised how much more attractive brown Hair was than fair, and how brilliant could be the sparkle of dark Eyes as against the more languorous expression of those that are blue.

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I was not present at the time that You, Mistress, first made the acquaintance of Mr. Betterton. He came to the House originally for the sole purpose of consulting with his Brother-in-law on a point of Law, he having an idea of joining Sir William Davenant in the Management of the new Theatre

which that Gentleman was about to open in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

The season in London promised to be very brilliant. His Majesty the King was coming into his own once more. Within a Month or two at the latest, he would land at Dover, and as even through his misfortunes and exile he had always been a great Patron of the Arts of Drama and Literature, there was no doubt that he would give his gracious Patronage to such enterprises as Sir William Davenant and Mr. Killigrew, not to mention others, had already in view.

No doubt that Sir William Davenant felt that no Company of Actors could be really complete without the leadership of Mr. Betterton; and we all knew that both he and Mr. Killigrew were literally fighting one another to obtain the great Actor’s services.

In the end, of course, it was Sir William who won, and thus Mr. Betterton came to visit Mr. Theophilus Baggs to arrange for an Indenture whereby he was to have a Share of the Profits derived from the Performances at the new Theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

You, Mistress, will remember that Day even better than I do, for to me it only marked one more Stage on the dreary road of my uneventful Life, whilst for You it meant the first Pearl in that jewelled Crown of Happiness which Destiny hath fashioned for You. Mr. Baggs had sent me on that day to Richmond, to see a Client of his there. Whether he did this purposely, at the instance of Mistress Euphrosine, in order to get me out of the way, I know not. In her Estimation I was supposed to have leanings for the Actor’s profession in those days—surely a foolish Supposition, seeing how

unprepossessing was my Appearance and how mediocre my Intellect.

Without doubt, however, could she have read the Secrets of your Soul, dear Mistress, she would have sent You on an errand too, to a remote corner of England, or had locked You up in your Room, ere you came face to face with the great Man whose Personality and Visage were already deeply graven upon your Heart.

But her futile, unamiable Mind was even then torn between the desire to make a brave show of Prosperity before her illustrious Brother and to welcome him as the Friend and Companion of great Gentlemen, and the old puritanical Spirit within her which still looked upon Actors as Rogues and Vagabonds, Men upon whom God would shower some very special, altogether terrible Curses because of their loose and immoral Lives.

Thus Mistress Euphrosine's treatment of the distinguished Actor was ever contradictory. She did her best to make him feel that she despised him for his Calling, yet nevertheless she fawned upon him because of his connection with the Aristocracy. Even subsequently, when Mr. Betterton enjoyed not only the Patronage but the actual Friendship of His Majesty the King, Mistress Euphrosine's attitude towards him was always one of pious scorn. He might be enjoying the protection of an earthly King, but what was that in comparison with his Sister's intimacy with God? He might consort with Dukes, but she would anon make one in a company of Angels, amongst whom such Reprobates as Actors would never find a place.

That, I think, was her chief Attitude of Mind, one that caused me much Indignation at the time; for I felt that I could have knelt down and worshipped the heaven-born Genius who was delighting the whole Kingdom with his Art. But Mr. Betterton, with his habitual kindliness and good humour, paid no heed to Mistress Euphrosine's sour Disposition towards him, and when she tried to wither him with lofty Speeches, he would quickly make her ridiculous with witty Repartee.

He came more and more frequently to the House, and mine Eyes being unusually sharp in such matters, I soon saw that You had wholly won his regard. Those then became happy times. Happy ones for You, Mistress, whose Love for a great and good Man was finding full Reciprocity. Happy ones for him, who in You had found not only a loving Heart, but rare understanding, and that great Talent which he then and there set himself to develop. They were happy times also for me, the poor, obscure Scrivener with the starved Heart and the dreary Life, who now was allowed to warm his Soul in the Sunshine of your joint Happiness.

It was not long before Mr. Betterton noticed the profound Admiration which I had for him, not long before he admitted me to his Friendship and Intimacy. I say it with utmost pride, that I was the first one with whom he discussed the question of your Career and to whom he confided the fact that You had a conspicuous talent for the Stage, and that he intended to teach and to train You until You could appear with him on the Boards. You may imagine how this Idea staggered me at first—aye! and horrified me a little. I suppose that something of the old puritanical middle-class